



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### INTERIOR SECRETARY HODEL, THREE WESTERN GOVERNORS SIGN PACT ON ENDANGERED FISHES FOR UPPER COLORADO RIVER

The Colorado River -- a 1,400-mile resource called "the world's most regulated river" because of competing demands for its water in the arid region it flows through -- may become a safer place to live for endangered fishes in its upper basin because of an agreement signed today in Denver by Secretary of the Interior Don Hodel, the governors of Colorado and Wyoming, and the Western Area Power Administration. Signing by the Governor of Utah will take place tomorrow, January 22, in Salt Lake City.

The agreement approved today commits various Federal natural resource agencies and the States to a coordinated plan for the recovery of three endangered species of fish in the Upper Colorado. It is the first step for recovery efforts by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect these rare fish in a way that addresses States' water rights and the various interstate compacts that allocate Colorado River water and guide water development and management in the basin.

"With this recovery program, the needs of fish will be identified and met while still allowing water development interests to proceed," Hodel said.

"By working together on this problem, we have overcome a major hurdle in the road to recovery of the species."

The recovery program outlines efforts to recover endangered fishes over the next 15 years. The program could include further acquisition of water rights to meet instream flow needs of the species and construction of fish passageways and hatcheries.

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"Managing fish and wildlife resources in the Colorado River has a long way to go, but by working together the road now looks much brighter," said Frank Dunkle, director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Federal agency responsible for the recovery of endangered species in the region.

The Colorado River basin encompasses more than 242,000 square miles in six western States -- Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Its water supports many municipal and industrial uses, agricultural irrigation, hydroelectric power generation, recreation, and fish and wildlife.

Early water development which tamed the turbulent, free-flowing stretches of the Colorado and its tributaries and which drew increasing amounts of water from the system contributed to the decline of fish that had evolved in this unique habitat. Three species that are found in the Upper Colorado -- the Colorado squawfish, the bonytail chub, and the humpback chub -- are listed as endangered by the Federal Government. A fourth, the razorback sucker, is a candidate for Federal listing.

Since 1978, the Fish and Wildlife Service has concluded that the localized impacts of these projects, and their broader, cumulative impacts throughout the basin, jeopardize the existence of these endangered species.

In 1984, the Service prepared a draft conservation plan that specified minimum water flows necessary to protect these fishes. Water development interests objected to the designation of minimum flows as a possible infringement of States' water rights and interstate agreements on water allocation. A coordinating committee was created and has worked for 4 years to evaluate alternatives and develop a recovery program that acknowledged and balanced these competing demands, leading to today's agreement by which all parties will cooperate in future efforts to preserve the fish while minimizing impacts on water development.

"This landmark agreement should serve as a model for what can be accomplished when groups with differing philosophies look for ways to solve a common problem without sacrificing either environmental quality or economic growth," said Colorado Governor Roy R. Romer at today's signing ceremony.

"Wyoming endorses the recovery program for endangered species in the Upper Colorado River drainage and we are happy to cooperate with our neighboring States and the Federal Government in this endeavor," added Governor Michael J. Sullivan. "While we may question some of the statements in this extensive document, we support the overall approach."

The two governors were joined by Dunkle and William Clagett, administrator of the Western Area Power Administration, a bureau of the U.S. Department of Energy. Utah Governor Norman H. Bangerter commented in a prepared statement, "This agreement is notable -- it is intended that this will resolve a longstanding dispute between water developers and environmental interests."